

Thomas Jefferson to Henry Dearborn, January 8, 1808, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO THE SECRETARY AT WAR¹ J. MSS. (HENRY DEARBORN.)

¹ Jefferson further wrote to Dearborn:

“ Monticello, May 25, 08.

“ Dear Sir,—There is a subject on which I wished to speak with you before I left Washington; but an apt occasion did not occur. It is that of your continuance in office. Perhaps it is as well to submit my thoughts to you by letter. The present summer is too important in point of preparation, to leave your department unfilled, for any time, as I once thought might be done; and it would be with extreme reluctance that, so near the time of my own retirement, I should proceed to name any high officer, especially one who must be of the intimate councils of my successor, and who ought of course to be in his unreserved confidence. I think too it would make an honorable close of your term as well as mine, to leave our country in a state of substantial defence, which we found quite unprepared for it. Indeed, it would for me be a joyful annunciation to the next meeting of Congress, that the operations of defence are all compleat. I know that New York must be an exception; but perhaps even that may be closed before the 4th of March, when you & I might both make our bow with approbation & satisfaction. Nor should I suppose that under present circumstances, anything interesting in your future office could make it important for you to repair to it's immediate occupation. In February my successor will be declared, and may then, without reserve, say whom he would wish me to nominate to the Senate in your place. I submit these circumstances to your consideration, & wishing in all things to consult

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your interests, your fame & feelings, it will give me sincere joy to learn that you will 'watch with me to the end.' I salute you with great affection and respect."

Washington, January 8, 1808.

Dear Sir, —Your letter of Dec. 29 brings to my mind a subject which never has presented itself but with great pain, that of your withdrawing from the administration, before I withdraw myself. It would have been to me the greatest of consolations to have gone thro my term with the same coadjutors, and to have shared with them the merit, or demerit, of whatever good or evil we may have done. The integrity, attention, skill, & economy with which you have conducted your department, have given me the most compleat and unqualified satisfaction, and this testimony I bear to it with all the sincerity of truth and friendship; and should a war come on, there is no person in the U.S. to whose management and care I could commit it with equal confidence. That you as well as myself, & all our brethren, have maligners, who from ill-temper, or disappointment, seek opportunities of venting their angry passions against us, is well known, & too well understood by our constituents to be regarded. No man who can succeed you will have fewer, nor will any one enjoy a more extensive confidence thro the nation. Finding that I could not retain you to the end of my term, I had wished to protract your stay, till I could with propriety devolve on another the naming of your successor. But this probably could not be done till about the time of our separation in July. Your continuance however, till after the end of the session, will relieve me from the necessity of any nomination during the session, & will leave me only a chasm of or 3 months over which I must hobble as well as I can. My greatest difficulty will arise from the carrying on the system of defensive works we propose to erect. That these should have been fairly under way, and in a course of execution, under your direction, would have peculiarly relieved me; because we concur so exactly in the scale on which they are to be executed. Unacquainted with the details

myself, I fear that when you are gone, aided only by your chief clerk, I shall be assailed with schemes of improvement and alterations which I shall be embarrassed to pronounce

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on, or withstand, and incur augmentations of expense, which I shall not know how to control. I speak of the interval between the close of this session, when you propose to retire, & the commencement of our usual recess in July. Because during that recess, we are in the habit of leaving things to the chief clerks; and, by the end of it, my successor may be pretty well known, and prevailed on to name yours. However, I am so much relieved by your ekeing out your continuance to the end of the session, that I feel myself bound to consult your inclinations then, & to take on myself the difficulties of the short period then ensuing. In public or private, and in all situations, I shall retain for you the most cordial esteem, and satisfactory recollections of the harmony & friendship with which we have run our race together; and I pray you now to accept sincere assurances of it, & of my great respect & attachment.